Gorillaz for Dummies

Q: What has four heads, a Grammy, a Guinness world record, an Ivor Novello, a bad case of shingles and Madonna's phone number???

A: GORILLAZ! And they are BACK with **Humanz,** their first album in 7 years.

Once upon a time - before streaming services, social media or segways - four unusual characters came together through an unlikely combination of GBH and a poorly worded advert in the NME.

They are:

Murdoc Niccals: bass
Favourite colour: episcopal purple

Russel Hobbs: drums
Special skill: communicating with the spirit world

2D: vocals, melodica, keyboards
IQ: celestial

Noodle: guitars
Hobbies: zombie slaying and philosophy

This is their story.

Following failed attempts at superstardom in outfits such as the Burning Sensations and Two's A Crowd, saturnine bass-slayer Murdoc A. Niccals literally bumped in to one Stuart Pot (with his Vauxhall Astra) on a sunny Saturday in August 1997. The impact knocked Stu's eyes clean out and gave him the vacant stare that has captivated audiences ever since – and his nickname 2D, or Two Dents. Immediately recognizing the pop-cultural power of a voidoid blue-haired front man, Murdoc moved quickly, 'securing the services' of Brooklyn-born drummer Russel Hobbs by the simple method of kidnapping him. A well-spoken, well-educated Renaissance man, Hobbs was the yang to Murdoc's gobby, grubby yin.

The embryonic Gorillaz holed up in their mysteriously-acquired Essex base Kong Studios and started rehearsing, and Murdoc placed an ad in the NME for a new guitarist. The call was answered by teenage axe-prodigy Noodle: three foot two inches of total guitar brilliance and unbridled joy, she arrived in a Fedex parcel from Japan and Gorillaz was born.

Signed by Parlophone Records at their first gig at Camden's notorious Brownhouse, Gorillaz spent their advance on Kong Studios and settled in to record their self-titled debut album with US producer Dan 'The Automator' Nakamura. **Gorillaz** featured artists including Talking Heads/Tom Tom Club's Chris Franz and Tina Weymouth, Buena Vista's Ibrahim Ferrer and Del tha Funkee Homosapien and the band were thrust on an unsuspecting public with a cover feature in Dazed & Confused Magazine and the Tomorrow Comes Today EP and video. As the

age of MTV became the age of the internet, Gorillaz opened their home Kong Studios to fans all over the world via Gorillaz.com. “Clint Eastwood” then propelled the band to the next level, with the album topping the UK charts and selling 200,000 the week of release in America.

With such solid gold success like that, it was only a matter of time before Hollywood came knocking – but after several months in LA with nothing to show for it Gorillaz were bummed out and bored of each other’s company. Murdoc headed to Mexico, where he was promptly jailed for passing dud cheques. Russel had a major mental breakdown but he was quickly rescued by Ike Turner, so that was OK. 2D ran away to the funfair, working the dodgems in Eastbourne and hanging out with Shane Lynch from Boyzone.

It was Noodle who journeyed the furthest, returning to Japan to discover the implausible truth about her early childhood as part of a junior fighting militia (with additional skills in weapons-grade guitar playing) Her memory, which had been wiped for her own safety by her mentor Mr Kyuzo, was restored and Noodle’s path was clear. She returned to Kong to take up arms against pop zombies who had mysteriously infested the studios in their absence and start work on the demos that would become Gorillaz’ second album, *Demon Days*.

Summoned by a text message from Noodle, the rest of the band returned to Kong in March 2004. Joined by producer Danger Mouse, with a stellar list of collaborators from MF Doom to Dennis Hopper. On its release in March 2005 *Demon Days* gathered remarkable reviews, with critics noting a new beauty, sophistication and coherence in the music and the videos.

Their US label boss was a small, twisted man by the name of Wee Jimmy Manson and he had it in for Gorillaz, big time. In a more than usually convoluted business deal, even for him, Murdoc had agreed that Manson would kill Noodle during the epic shoot for the fourth and final single from Demon Days, the lovely, melancholy El Manana. Noodle’s dramatic death, so their twisted logic ran, would seal Gorillaz spot in pop’s hall of fame – and with Gorillaz finished as a band Murdoc would be free to start again with a world-beating black metal group (no, really), with Manson on BVs.

Fans around the world were outraged when Noodle went down in flames, and chat rooms sprang up debating what exactly had happened, who was responsible and whether Noodle would ever be found alive. Whatever the outcome, it was clear that Gorillaz were done for now and Murdoc, Russel and 2D went their separate ways.

Murdoc went on a bender, burned down Kong and claimed the insurance money. His subsequent search for a hideout brought him to an island made entirely out of waste plastic and other landfill at Point Nemo in the South Pacific Ocean. Without a band, he was forced to improvise, building a cyborg Noodle from fragments of her DNA he’d scraped up from the El Manana crash site, and using Russel’s hip hop machine to approximate the big man’s percussion style. 2D’s nasal croon was beyond imitation though, and Murdoc dispatched one of his ‘associates’,

the terrifying Boogie Man, to Beirut to fetch the feckless frontman back. The usual mind-bending array of musical guests was recruited – and Murdoc managed to create their third masterpiece, ***Plastic Beach***, an allegorical picture of humanity, a picture of waste, destruction, consumerism and human failure.

As the whole Plastic Beach campaign was winding down, Russel reappeared, almost 60 times his usual size due to swallowing tons of polluted fish and hormone disrupting plastic, carrying Noodle on his back from Tasmania. However, when the band were all chased off by pirates, Russel was captured and exhibited as the Korean Godzilla, while Noodle ended up in a strange Japanese fishing village, where she accidentally released the shape shifting devil Mazuu. After lopping off his head and ending his earthly existence forever, she escaped his bodyguards and packed herself into a FedEx crate to West London, care of Murdoc Niccals.

Meanwhile, 2D managed to get eaten by a whale, and, upon disgorgement, ended up in a castaway situation on a tropical beach for several months before releasing he was actually on Guadalupe and could have walked to civilization in 23 minutes all along. After a really long holiday, he boarded a plane to seek the smoggy embrace of West London and the dubious charms of Murdoc Niccals.

Ah, Murdoc. When the pirates struck, Murdoc decided caution was preferable to rash bravery: he abandoned his bandmates and sealed himself in a submarine to escape, with only Cyborg Noodle and his own demons for company. This paradise couldn't last and Murdoc was forced to surface where a ship loomed over him: the Battleship Ringo, pride of EMI's fleet. The record label had been searching the globe for Murdoc. But finally, they found him, the Gorillaz star was captured, slapped about a bit and taken to a secret prison in London where he was held until, one day, he was offered a deal by Entertainment Internal Affairs. In exchange for his release Murdoc agreed to write a new Gorillaz album, and moved immediately to a new studio home in West London and he rounded up his colleagues once again.

Drums, guitars, voice and bass – the band was back together and ready for Gorillaz IV: The Reckoning. Could their relationships possibly last another album? Could they possibly find a more catholic collection of guest artists? How would they respond to the savagery of the current geopolitical landscape? What direction would their unruly genius take this time?

Humanz sees Murdoc, 2D, Russel and Noodle cycle through hip hop and R'n'B, pop and reggaeton, soul and rock & roll joined, as always, by an impressive line-up of devoted disciples including **Jehnny Beth** (Savages), **Danny Brown, Benjamin Clementine, De La Soul, D.R.A.M, Peven Everett, Anthony Hamilton, Grace Jones, Zebra Katz, Kelela, Mavis Staples, Vince Staples, Popcaan, Pusha T, Jamie Principle** and **Kali Uchis** - with our fearless foursome pushing boundaries once again.

www.gorillaz.com